

entirely with private funds. Support came from the Cleveland Foundation, the Kent H. Smith Charitable Trust, and the Shaker Lakes Garden Club. Audubon Ohio did, however, receive a small amount of federal money, specifically a \$5,000 grant from the U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service. It goes to show how a relatively small amount of federal dollars can be leveraged to produce great results.

I commend Audubon, Ohio for helping to reconnect children with nature, particularly in the central city. Audubon and its Ohio program deserve high marks for their creativity and skill in doing so at the Rockefeller Park Greenhouse in Cleveland and elsewhere. They provide great hope for the future.

MARIANAS WAGE HIKE SHOWING POSITIVE EFFECTS

HON. GEORGE MILLER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 25, 2007

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Madam Speaker, I rise today to share encouraging news from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. As many of my colleagues know, I have been fighting for years to ensure that employers in the CNMI—an American territory in the Pacific—pay their workers an honest wage.

But for years, we were blocked from reforming the broken labor and immigration system in the Marianas. The corrupt lobbyist Jack Abramoff's collusion with then-Majority Leader Tom DeLay and others here in Congress meant that the CNMI's sweatshop-based economy persisted for almost two decades after we were first made aware of abuses there.

Eventually, Abramoff's dishonest schemes, which caused so much human misery, caught the attention of law enforcement, and the web of corruption is now unraveled. Jack Abramoff is in prison, Representative DeLay no longer serves in this House, and the Congress has a Democratic majority.

That is good news for the workers of America and especially those in the CNMI. Earlier this year, the new Congress raised the minimum wage across the country for the first time in almost a decade. And for the first time, that increase applies to the Northern Marianas. Today, workers there make \$3.55 an hour, up from the barely \$3 that workers there were paid for years.

This long-overdue reform is already having a positive effect, and I commend to my colleagues the article below from the Marianas Variety ("Labor: Wage hike drives locals to seek jobs"). As the article explains, we still lack good data on the CNMI job situation, but the trend is very encouraging: the number of people looking for jobs in September of this year was up by an incredible 80 percent compared to the same period last year, according to their Department of Labor.

For too long, thanks to policies that reinforced the low-wage garment industry's dominance, there were very few good-paying jobs in the Marianas: if you weren't willing to work for \$3 an hour, you could either work in the public sector, or you could live on public assistance. But as the Commonwealth's deputy

secretary of labor says in the article, "There are so many people looking for jobs not only because they need them but because the (minimum) wage is now \$3.55 an hour. It's waking them up to go out (and join the workforce)." The bottom line is that the increase in wages is attracting jobseekers to private sector jobs, exactly as we predicted.

It's an abiding shame that it took the U.S. Congress so many years to bring reforms to the Mariana Islands and to raise the minimum wage. And it was a major setback for workers there when the government of the Commonwealth went back on earlier attempts to raise the wage locally. But even though it comes years after I would have liked, I am pleased, although not surprised, by this early report. Under the leadership of this New Direction Congress, we are starting to turn things around, and we are beginning to see the positive results of raising the minimum wage.

Paying honest wages for honest work is good for our economy and the right policy for our country. Members of this Congress should be proud that we are moving America, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, in a new direction.

[From the Marianas Variety, Oct. 26, 2007]

LABOR: WAGE HIKE DRIVES LOCALS TO SEEK JOBS

(By Gemma Q. Casas)

The 50-cent increase on the local minimum wage in July resulted in an increase in the number of locals seeking employment assistance at the Department of Labor, according to its deputy secretary, Alfred Pangelinan.

He said there were 1,800 local jobseekers in September up by 80 percent compared to the same period last year when Labor assisted 1,000 jobseekers.

He attributed the sudden surge to the increase on the minimum wage from \$3.05 an hour to \$3.55 and the worsening economic crisis. "There are so many people looking for jobs not only because they need them but because the (minimum) wage is now \$3.55 an hour. It's waking them up to go out (and join the workforce)," he said.

He believes that as the local minimum wage increases, more residents will be enticed to work in the private sector.

The Federal Minimum Wage Act became law in May of this year and it also applies to the CNMI, mandating an increase of the local minimum wage by 50 cents every year until it reaches the U.S. minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour.

The next 50-cent increase in the CNMI minimum wage will take effect in July 2008, which will raise the rate to \$4.05 an hour.

The Department of Labor says it is also making sure that local residents who are employed get the monetary equivalent of their foreign counterparts' non-monetary benefits to further encourage them to work.

Pangelinan said the real unemployment rate among the local population is difficult to determine because the statistics only include those that come forward and seek assistance. There hasn't been any CNMI-wide survey conducted in recent years to determine how many local residents are jobless.

TRIBUTE TO CHRISTINA HALE VANBRAKLE

HON. CHRIS VAN HOLLEN

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 25, 2007

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Ms. Christina Hale

VanBrakle, who everyone knows as "Tina," a long-time employee of the Federal Election Commission, who will retire from the United States Government at the end of this year after more than 38 years of distinguished federal service. Tina has spent 28 of those years working at the Federal Election Commission and the last 19 assisting me and many of my colleagues as the FEC's Director of Congressional, Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs.

A native of Washington, DC, Tina grew up in Maryland and has been a resident of Silver Spring in Montgomery County, Maryland for the last 24 years. After graduating from Suitland Senior High School in Maryland, she accepted a job at the Maritime Administration, Department of Commerce, where she spent 2 years working as a press assistant for the late John K. Tennant, who was the Press Officer. Mr. Tennant introduced Tina to then-Chairman Helen Delich Bentley of the Federal Maritime Commission, and former Congresswoman from Maryland. She accepted a secretarial position with Chairman Bentley where she was employed for several years. Tina has fond memories of traveling with Chairman Bentley on various speaking engagements. Most memorable was a visit to San Clemente—the Western White House—for a meeting with Japanese shipping interests during the Nixon Administration. Tina also met her husband, Bryant, while employed at the FMC. They were married in 1983 and have three children, Wendy, Ashley and Derek. They have one grandchild, Dominic, with another expected in January 2008.

Tina also worked with Vice Chairman Barbara Hackman Franklin at the Consumer Product Safety Commission, CPSC, enrolling at the University of Maryland at night, where she earned a Paralegal Certificate in the Legislative Liaison Program and a B.S. in management and technology and political science. Tina then joined the newly created Washington office of a Detroit law firm.

Tina joined the Federal Election Commission in 1979, where she worked for the Deputy Staff Director, then served as Special Assistant to the Staff Director. In 1988 she was named Director of Congressional, Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs. Tina is widely respected on the Hill for her dedication and quick and accurate responses to questions and perhaps will be best remembered by the campaign finance community for providing fair and impartial advice to anyone who contacted her.

Whether she was answering a simple question regarding the campaign finance laws, preparing a fact sheet for a Member of Congress on a budget or campaign finance matter, or preparing Commissioners for a hearing, Tina served with commitment, integrity and competence. On the occasion of her retirement from the United States Government, I offer my congratulations, and wish Tina and her husband, Bryant, all the best in their future endeavors.